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Front Edit Other
Page Page Page

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CIA Dabbling in Foreign Policy

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The leakage of part of a Central Intelligence Agency document called "Trends in the World Situation" has prompted the State Department and the CIA to release the entire report. And the full article may raise more eyebrows than the fragment.

The portion of the document which originally broke into print expressed the doubt of the author, Willard Matthias, that victory could be won in Viet Nam. Mr. Matthias is on the CIA's Board of National Estimates. The State Department, with a wary eye on Senator Goldwater, says neither this nor the rest of the document represents official administration policy.

However, the question then arises as to just what the statements do represent. And what on earth is the CIA doing making some of the determinations in the report anyhow?

On the heels of the statement about an unlikely victory in Viet Nam is this further observation: "There is . . . a chance that political evolution within the country and developments upon the world scene could lead to some kind of negotiated settlement based on neutralization." Possibly a sound conclusion, but following the statement that victory is doubtful it seems to suggest a line of U.S. foreign policy. And whatever the merits of such a policy suggestion, is this the affair of the CIA?

Or consider this comment on the nuclear situation: "Thus if there is any valid and rational concept today upon which to develop and measure a strategic military force, it is that of deterrence." Since when is it the CIA's job to point out valid military concepts?

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Then there is this pronouncement: "Despite changes in the world situation and the manner in which the world's leaders look upon it, the danger of a general nuclear war with all its horrible consequences will continue to be the overriding problem of our time."

cord in the West not destroying Nato but, however, "forcing Western nations to recognize the underlying diversity of their concerns."

The chief function of an intelligence agency is to gather information, to evaluate its accuracy and often to try to determine what it adds up to in terms of other nations' intentions. In the case of the CIA, the role has obviously been broadened to encompass, in the area of counter-intelligence, undercover operations to frustrate purposes inimical to ours. But the Matthias statement hints of something much broader than this.

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Certainly the American public is not aware that the CIA has the duty of synthesizing, Toynbee-like, the currents of history, or suggesting how the struggle with communism be pursued, or commenting on the direction of our alliances, or postulating what the overriding issues of the times may be.

Heretofore much of the worry about the CIA's exceeding its limits has been directed to evidence that its functionaries were pursuing a kind of independent on-the-scenes foreign policy of their own in such places as Cuba, the Congo and Viet Nam.

But now, in the Matthias "think piece," there seems good reason to believe that the agency is propagating broad policy views at the very top. Whether it is doing so at the invitation of the State Department high command or on its own initiative doesn't lessen the concern this arouses. And the State Department didn't remove any of the worry with its attempt to reassure the country that the statement didn't represent official foreign policy.

No government agency so effectively screened from public scrutiny as the CIA should be nudging the government along any particular policy course. It should be one of the tools providing the factual basis on which the President and his advisors make their decisions. It should in no sense